



prairie crayfish

Procambarus gracilis

Kingdom: Animalia
Division/Phylum: Arthropoda
Class: Malacostraca
Order: Decapoda

Features

The prairie crayfish has large claws with many bumps. The adult has a bright red thorax and abdomen and is reddish-brown elsewhere. Young are reddish-brown overall. It has a high dome-shaped carapace (head and thorax) which is longer than the abdomen. Adults may be up to 2 4/5 inches long.

Natural History

The prairie crayfish digs burrows in low, poorly drained land that is covered with grasses or other prairie plants. Since so little prairie remains in the state today, it is found most often near ditches. It is very secretive and spends most of the year underground in a burrow that may reach over six feet deep. The burrow often is below the water table and is water-filled. On moist nights or during periods of heavy rainfall, it may be found walking about on the soil's surface. It may live for three or four years. Females with young attached have been found in Iowa in March, April, and October.

Habitats

Mississippi River; Missouri River; interior rivers and streams; wet prairies and fens

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

southern half of Iowa and scattered in northern Iowa in suitable habitats

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.